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CHEAP REPOSITORY.

SUNDAY READING.

THE
JUDGMENT
AWAITING
INDUTIFUL CHILDREN.
ILLUSTRATED IN THE
HISTORY OF ABSALOM.



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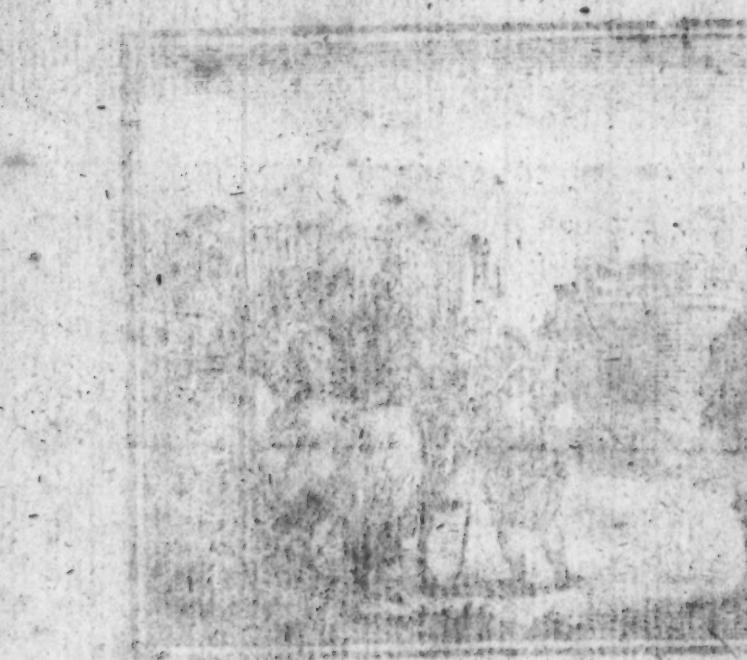
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The JUDGMENT, &c.

DAVID, who succeeded Saul in the kingdom of Israel, had sons by different wives; among them was Amnon, the son of Ahinoam, a woman of Geth, and Absalom, whose mother was Maachab, daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. Neither these princes, like their father, followed the law of God: the eldest, Amnon, appears to have been every profligate young man; wholly guided by his passions, he owned no other law, and scrupled not to sacrifice the most sacred ties to gratify them.

Absalom, on the other hand, was impetuous, volatile, and ambitious, full of pride and vanity; which was probably increased by the beauty of his person, which is said to have exceeded that of all his father's subjects. It is no uncommon thing for a man, if God has bestowed on us any endowment in person or mind, which appears to us in any degree superior to those with whom we associate, to draw

from it a consequence ill suited to the state of humiliation in which we stand before our Creator; we forget that with a single breath he can effectually humble our foolish pride, by reducing us to nothing from whence his goodness called us into being. Absalom was too much intoxicated to reflect upon this; from the beauty of his person he began to consider the endowments of his mind, and to believe they fitted him for universal dominion; this vanity probably first blew up those embers which in the end kindled a flame that proved his destruction.

It seems hard that so good and pious a king should have children so depraved and vicious; but we know that every one has his crosses in this life, and that "*all things work together for good to them that love God.*" It is no reproach to good parents to have bad children, if they are conscious of not having been accessory to their vices, either by giving them a bad example in their own conduct, improper indulgence, or negligence in instructing them in their duty, they may indeed lament, but have no cause for reproach, and may with confidence, in this as in all other afflictions, look for consolation to their merciful God, who is ever ready to grant it to those who ask it in true sincerity and simplicity of heart: but to return.

The ties of blood which united Amnon and Absalom could not restrain the animosity which animated them against each other; this on the side of Absalom especially was so strong, on account of an injury he had offered his sister Tamar, that

held no intercourse with Amnon, and meditated most cruel and bloody revenge.

Opportunities are seldom wanting to perpetrate the crime which Satan has once suggested, and pressed upon us to perpetrate: our only security is to turn a deaf ear to his evil insinuations when they are first offered; for if we begin to parley, and once submit ourselves to his guidance, he will carry us from step to step, till he has involved us in a gulf of sin and misery, from whence we shall only endeavour to retreat. "*Resist the Devil,*" is the Scripture, "*and he will flee from you.*" And this is certainly true; but we must resist his assault if we would gain an easy victory: it is such is the power and mercy of God in Christ Jesus, that he can, if we call upon him with a sincere wish of being delivered from the bondage of sin, bring us up from the lowest pit of hell; such is the malice of our destroyer, he takes from us often even the *desire* of that deliverance from his yoke which is necessary to our peace here, and our salvation hereafter.

The moment that Absalom sought to gratify his vengeance at length arrived: he had a sheep-shearing at a place called Baal-hazor, to which he invited the king, his sons, and his whole household. His invitation David declined accepting, from the fear of burdening his son with the expence of entertaining so large a retinue; Absalom however entreated that he would at least permit Amnon and his other brothers to be his guests, to which

David at length consented. But all this shew friendship and hospitality was but a cloak to his treachery he meditated ; for in the midst of the entertainment, " when Amnon's heart was merry with wine," the servants of Absalom, by the order of their master, rushed in and smote him and killed him.

It is difficult to describe the terror and consternation this bloody and unexpected event must have occasioned among the princes. They rose in confusion, not knowing but their lives were meant to complete the bloody tragedy, and, mounting their mules, fled with the utmost precipitation.

Ill news, it is said, ever flies apace : while the princes were on their way intelligence reached the king that Absalom had slain all his brothers, and that not one of them remained alive to bear the distressing tidings. It is easy to imagine the horror which must have seized the unhappy parent ; the idea that all his children were slain, slain too by one so dear to him, one too whom the tie of blood as well as of hospitality should have bound to have been their defender rather than their assassin, struck home to the heart ; and was near bowing him to the grave ; the good king rent his cloaths, and threw himself on the earth in all the bitterness of grief, and refused to take comfort till Jonabab, his nephew, informed him that Amnon only was slain, but that by the appointment of his brother Absalom the insult he had offered his sister.

The comparison of a less evil with a greater

never makes it appear lighter : thus it was with David ; the loss of one son was not so great as of all, and, no doubt, he lifted up his heart with gratitude to his Creator for averting so great a calamity, nevertheless, he could not forbear mourning for Amnon, great as his transgressions had been, nor feeling a just indignation against Absalom for the bloody vengeance he had taken. Absalom was aware of this, and fearing to meet his father's displeasure, fled to the court of a prince named Talmai, the son of the king of Geshur, where he remained three years.

In this time David's grief for his son Amnon abated, and his resentment against his murderer cooled : the tender yearnings of a parent, which are on every occasion so conspicuous in the character of this good king, returned and pleaded in the behalf of Absalom.

Joab, one of his captains, seeing that he was inclined to a reconciliation with his son, and that an opportunity to recall him would not perhaps be displeasing, brought him, by means of a parable he put in the mouth of a woman of Tekoah, to consent to Absalom's return, but though the indulgence of a father and the good offices of Joab induced the king thus far to remit his just resentment, he could not be prevailed upon to see his son, and Absalom, after he returned, remained two years in Jerusalem without ever being admitted into the presence of his father. At length becoming impatient, either because he really felt an affection for his father, or to promote some sinister views

of his own, he sent for Joab to expostulate in his behalf with the king, but Joab, from what cause is not mentioned, neglected to attend at the summons, which so incensed the irritable temper of this violent prince, that he ordered his servants to set fire to a field of Joab's which lay near his own. This doubtless surprized and roused his indignation, for he came immediately to Absalom to enquire the reason of this outrage. The prince answered only by reproaching him with his neglect: "I sent unto thee," says he, "to say unto the king, 'Wherefore am I come from Geshun? It had been good for me to have been there still.' Now, therefore, let me see the king's face, and if there be any iniquity in me let him kill me."

This message Joab took to the king, who was moved with his son's submission, and consented to see him. Absalom, when he came into the king's presence, fell upon his face before him, when the kind father, forgetting all that was past, raised him up, and embraced him with all the warmth of affection. We do not hear that he was loaded with one reproach; he appears sensible of his error and the good king is satisfied. Such generous and kind treatment from a parent whom he had wounded in the tenderest part, would have proved, it might have been supposed, a lasting tie on the duty and gratitude of the prince; but, alas! it was far otherwise. Ambition was laying a fatal snare for Absalom. He already began to look with an eye of envy on the sovereign power of his father; he was dazzled with the splendor of a crown, and resolved not to stop at any means, however base and iniquitous, to

attain it : the duty he owed to a father and a sovereign seemed little, when set in competition with the object that had fired his imagination.

His first step was to provide himself with chariots, horses, and a numerous retinue, that he might emulate the splendor of his father, and equally awe and impress the minds of the people with his power and the dignity of his character : nor was this all, he descended to the meanest and most vile arts to entrap the affections of the people ; such as affecting great humility, accosting them with familiarity, enquiring into their affairs with apparent interest, and by not seeming to exact the homage of their lawful sovereign, to rival him effectually in their esteem ; nor was this all, when any one was going to have a cause judged, he would insinuate, that proper people were not appointed to hear it, and do him justice, and ended by wishing that he was made judge in Israel, that he might distribute justice equally. These arts were but too successful ; for we are told, that *Abfalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.*

When he thought his party sufficiently strong, under pretence of performing a religious vow, he withdrew to a place called Hebron, where, some time after, he got himself proclaimed king : in the mean while he sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel to strengthen his party, so that the conspiracy was very strong, even Ahithophel, David's chief counsellor, a man in great repute, was wicked enough to abet his designs, and join his interest.

The tidings of this unnatural conspiracy having reached the ears of David, he no longer thought himself safe in the city, but resolved to flee from it with all speed; to this end he ordered his servants to make no delay, but to use the utmost dispatch left, as he expressed it, Absalom should overtake them suddenly, and smite the city with the edge of the sword. Gracious heaven! a parent to be reduced to such extremity by his own child! Does not every heart bleed for him? What must have been his sufferings! nothing but that firm confidence which we find him ever place in his Maker could have supported him under a stroke, which must have been, surely, more severe than all his former misfortunes.

This good king was not however wholly abandoned in his distress; among his subjects some were found faithful: the servants of his household testified their readiness to follow him whithersoever he went: six hundred men also, who were not of his country, but had come with him from the city of Gath, were forward to express their attachment and willingness to follow him. To *Itai*, the chief of these, David said, "Wherefore goest thou with us? return to thy place and abide with the king (meaning Absalom, who had been proclaimed throughout the city) for thou art a stranger and also an exile. Thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us, seeing I go whither I may; return and take thy brethren with thee, and mercy and truth be with thee."

But how nobly does this generous exile reply!—
 "The Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth,
 I will be with thee, in what place my lord the king shall be,
 whether in death or life, even there also will thy
 servant be." How amiable does the conduct of
 this stranger appear, when so many of the king's
 own subjects had, forgetful of all his past kindness,
 deserted him.

The king and all those who had not been re-
 ceived by the artifices of Absalom had removed to
 a place at some distance from the city, from whence
 they passed on, we are told, to the wilderness be-
 yond the brook Kidron: Zadok the priest attended
 also with the ark of the covenant of God, but David
 ordered him to carry it back into the city, saying,
 "that if it were the will of God he would cause him
 to return, if not he would do what seemed good
 unto him." Zadok therefore, and the Levites that
 were with him, returned into the city, and remained
 there as David had commanded. When David
 heard that Ahithophel has with Absalom among the
 conspirators he put up a fervent prayer to the Lord,
 that he would confound the council of such a sub-
 versive politician; for Ahithophel was, we are told, in
 those days looked up to as an oracle. As he re-
 turned from offering up this prayer, he was met by
 Hushia the Archite, who had also followed him,
 when the Lord put it suddenly in his mind to make
 use of this man as an agent to overthrow the council
 of Ahithophel, and to procure intelligence concern-
 ing the designs of Absalom. At the king's request,
 therefore, Hushia consented to introduce himself
 to Absalom, as one who had deserted from his father

and who now offered his services to him. Before I relate the success of Hushia's undertaking I must record a circumstance which proves the singular moderation and forbearance of the king, and which is well worthy the imitation of us all, as he was journeying in the wilderness, a man of the family of Saul, named Shimea, came out and insulted David with the most opprobrious language; cursing him, throwing stones at him, and loading him with the vilest epithets. Abishia, one of the king's followers, enraged at seeing his master thus insulted, begged that he would suffer him to seize him, and take off his head; but David said to Abishia, and to all his servants, Let him curse? Behold! my son, who came forth from my bowels, seeketh me for life; how much more may this Benjamite do it? What an example was here of that peaceful spirit which was in after ages to shine forth so gloriously in the blessed Messiah, who was to descend according to the flesh from this righteous patriarch. Just so did our Lord reprove the zeal of Peter who prompted him to draw his sword and cut off the high priest's servant's ear, which he in the same blessed spirit immediately healed. In the mean time Abishalom and his followers, with Ahithophel, came to Jerusalem; and Hushia, as had been before concerted, presented himself as a deserter from David. Abishalom was deceived, and thinking the tale true, admitted him into the council. Ahithophel, when the business came to be discussed in the council, advised Abishalom to give him immediately the command of twelve thousand men, that he might pursue David that night, while his army was weak and weary with their march, and effectually overthrow

em; but when it came to Hushia's turn to speak, he overthrew Ahithophel's council, by advising Absalom, as his father was a mighty man, to collect his whole army together, and to head them himself. This advice pleased Absalom better than Ahithophel's, which so enraged that subtle counsellor and wounded his pride, that he returned home, neglected the affairs of his household, and hung himself. Thus making an end worthy the treachery and wickedness that had marked his life.

In the mean time the faithful Hushia, through the sons of Zadok the priest, sent David privately intelligence of what he had advised, but counselled him nevertheless not to remain in the wilderness, and what Ahithophel had advised should be preferred. David therefore passed over the river Jordan, and came to a place called Mahanaim, where he obtained a supply of provisions and necessaries for his army, of which it stood much in need, as they were weary and faint with their march. In a short time Absalom, having collected his army, pursued his father over the river Jordan, and pitched his tents in the same land. When David heard of this he numbered his troops and prepared his army for battle, resolving to head them himself; but his people persuaded him not to go, as, in case they met him, the idea of taking the king, would induce them to pursue them more obstinately: the king therefore consented to remain in the city, and from time to time to send succours to his army. Nothing could be more affecting than the tender solicitude of a good king toward his ungrateful child; who, though pursuing him from place to place, and, horrid

relate! thirsting for his blood, was still an object of his tenderest regard. Before the army left the city, we hear him giving all his captains this pathetic charge—*Deal gently with the young man for my sake even with Absalom.*

The two armies met at length in a wood called Ephraim, where a desperate battle was fought: Absalom's army was routed, and a great slaughter of his men followed, he himself fled, but God would not suffer his sin to escape unpunished, as he passed through a thicket his hair, which was uncommonly long and beautiful, was entangled in the branches of an oak, and, as the scripture expresses it, he was suspended between heaven and earth, and the moon on which he rode passed from under him. In this situation he was found by one of David's servants who ran and told Joab, not venturing to lay hands on him on account of the charge which had been given by the king concerning him. Joab, however, being less scrupulous, and considering his master's life not safe while he lived, hastened to the place where he was still hanging, and pierced him to the heart. After this Joab blew a trumpet to proclaim the victory, and prevent the soldiers from pursuing the Israelites that fled.

David sat at the gate of the city anxiously expecting news of the battle, when a messenger sent by Joab communicated tidings of the victory. This however seemed only a secondary concern to the tender father: *Is the young man Absalom safe?* was the question that instantly followed; and when the messenger replied, "May the enemies of my lord

the king, and all that rise up against him, be as that young man is: all the tenderness of the father broke forth; he wept aloud, and, as he went up into his chamber, exclaimed in the bitterness of his grief, "Oh! my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, Oh! Absalom my son, my son!" Such was the grief of David for his son, that the victory of that day we are told was changed into mourning, till Joab expostulated with him, and set before him the unreasonableness of his sorrow, when not only his own life, but the lives of his friends, and of his sons and his daughters had probably been preserved by the death of this wicked prince. Their leader being slain, the misguided populace whom he had seduced joyfully accepted the terms of pardon offered them, and David returned to Jerusalem amidst the universal shouts and exclamations of his people.

The fate of Absalom presents us with one among many examples of God's judgments against sin, which we may be assured sooner or later will meet its punishment. Absalom was guilty in two characters; that of a *son*, and of a *subject*. His ingratitude to his father was such as we cannot read of without considering him as a monster in the creation. And when the amiable and upright character of this king is considered, his justice, his moderation, his clemency, his wisdom, in short, when he is beheld as the favourite servant of his God, Absalom's rebellion as a subject appears scarcely less detestable. Both were punished by the total overthrow of all

those ambitious hopes for which he sacrificed every
 tie that ought to have been dear to a human being
 and by an untimely death, which he had not
 consolation of meeting honourably in the field
 of battle, but to receive attended with every humili-
 ating circumstance.



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